

Purple hibiscus: overview

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Symbols within Purple Hibiscus Ben Redman The novel Purple Hibiscus, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is a story of a girl learning to find her own voice and speak out against her violent oppressive father. The novel is set in post-colonial Nigeria, in a time in which the government was run by a military dictatorship. There are a number of symbols used to help develop ideas of the novel; the three most predominant ones being purple and red hibiscuses and Mama's figurines.

The red hibiscuses are symbolic of the violence and bloodshed in Kambili's life whereas the purple hibiscuses symbolize freedom, defiance and the courage to speak out. The figurines are symbolic of Mama's submissive character and denial of the violence in her home. These symbols help to develop one of the main themes of freedom vs. oppression. The color red also adds to the symbolism of the red hibiscuses. Red is a color which is often associated with anger, violence and bloodshed. These are all recurring motifs in the novel with her father's reign of terror over the family.

Red is the color that seems to haunt Kambili, ever since the beginning when she had to clean up her mother's blood, after the father abused and cause her to have a miss carriage. For a long time after the horrific incident, Kambili could not concentrate on anything but the "red blur" and the "narrow lines of blood" which hold together the images of her dead baby brother and her badly beaten mother. The red hibiscuses that are planted in the garden of the family's home in Enugu suggest the family's oppression, as it is only through Papa's violence that he keeps them under his control.

Kambili, shows major changes throughout the story in her confidence and personality by gaining a voice. Kambili is an extremely shy girl because of

she lives with the constant terror that her father rains down on her, the father has scared Kambili to the point where she cannot even think for herself. Adichie shows Kambili's transformation mainly using dialogue and internal monologue, these changes Kambili made in herself were crucial in the story because they explained how she learns to break free from her fanatical father.

At the beginning of the novel Kambili is perceived by her fellow class mates and peers to be stuck up and different because the students knew Kambili came from money and power, and thought she was ignoring them because maybe she thought she was better than everyone else. When in fact her silence and awkwardness is due to the fact that her father has crippled her self esteem so badly by showing oppressive parenting techniques. Her transition from silence to a full speaking girl is the most obvious change in the novel and it is what progresses the plot.

Like I mentioned before the red hibiscuses planted at their home symbolizes the father's terrible ways, and the power he has over the home. The red plants showed complete dominance over the household to the point where any of Kambili's thoughts or emotions were showed to reader through actions or internal monologue. The only time she would ever really speak was to mimic her father's preaching " God will deliver us," in her repeated efforts to gain approval of her treacherous father. However some light begins to show during her stay in Nsukka.

Before Kambili and Jaja went to stay with their aunt in Nsukka, they have never seen purple hibiscuses before. Purple hibiscuses in this story represents freedom, defiance and courage to speak out. This is very

<https://assignbuster.com/purple-hibiscus-overview/>

symbolic as it is only during their visit to their aunts home where they learn what true freedom is. Kambili's internal monologue begins to show signs of branching away from her silence and gaining a voice of her own. At first we see her struggling to break the silence as if she is scared that her father will find out somehow.

She was described censoring herself from talking back to her cousin Amaka because she is smart mouthed and that she might be upset with Kambili herself. The first time Kambili truly spoke with thoughts of her own was when her beloved Father Amadi asked her why she is so quiet and why she hasn't asked a question all night. Kambili was puzzled because no one has ever came to her and asked her to speak on something other than religious matters. What she said was " You don't have to shout, Amaka... I don't know how to do the orah leaves, but you can show me. Before this, they had known only of Papa's violence, his ' hurting love' and his oppressive, dictator-like control. Purple is a color that is often associated with royalty but also self-expression. This is important, as it is only through expressing oneself and speaking out against oppressors can freedom truly be achieved. We also learn that it is only through experimentation that gardeners can create the rare purple hibiscus. This emphasizes the fact that Kambili and Jaja take their first tentative steps of speaking out and defying their father's tyrannical rule.

The purple hibiscuses that grow at Aunty Ifeoma's house in Nsukka are described as in the novel as " rare fragrant, with undertones of freedom". These flowers are the most important symbols in the story as they are what represent Kambili's transformation. When the kids returned back to their

miserable home Jaja brought some cuttings of the purple hibiscus's and hid them in fridge, to give him and Kambili a sense of security and protection from their father.

He was afraid however that papa would find them and confiscate them, therefore almost crushing his rebellion. The contrast between the purple and red hibiscuses also is a large symbolic tool Adachi uses. The purple showing love, warmth, laughter and free expression what they experience in Nsukka, while red representing the constant fear they live under. Jaja bringing home the flowers brings inspiration to strive for freedom within their own home.